

THE RUBBER

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One day Mouse came upon an old rubber shoe. "I really don't need it" she said to herself and was about to continue on her way when she saw Mole coming down the path.

"Is that your rubber?" Mole asked, blinking at it.

"Yes," said Mouse.

"Will you give it to me?"

"If you dig me a good wide burrow I will," said sly Mouse.



Mole was a good digger and he soon had a fine burrow ready for Mouse. "Here's your new home. Mouse. I'm taking the rubber."



Mouse was very pleased and ran down the tunnel to see her new home. Meanwhile, as Mole dragged the rubber along he wondered what he would do with it. He was just about to leave it in the grass when he saw Hedgehog.

"Is that your rubber?" she asked.

"Certainly."

"Won't you let me have it?"

"If you bring me a dozen apples from your storeroom I will."

Hedgehog stuck a dozen apples on her quills and brought them to Mole. He was very pleased with the exchange.



Now that the rubber was hers. Hedgehog didn't know what to do with it. She was just about to leave it on the ground when Squirrel came hopping towards her.

"Is this your rubber?" Squirrel asked.

"It certainly is."

"Would you give it to me?"

"I will if you bring me the biggest pine cone you can find. And be sure it's full of nuts!"

When Squirrel brought her a really big pine cone Hedgehog said, "Ah, that's lovely! Now crack the nuts for me and you can have the rubber."



Squirrel didn't say that that wasn't part of the bargain. Instead, she quickly cracked the nuts. Hedgehog crawled off into the bushes to munch on her nuts and see what Squirrel would do with the rubber.

Squirrel, meanwhile, was busily stuffing leaves into a few holes in the rubber. Then she made a yoke from a springy twig and two pails from two large acorns. Soon she was running back and forth, filling the rubber with water from a nearby stream.



And then.... And then she plopped Baby Squirrel into the new bathtub and gave him a bath. Baby Squirrel squealed with delight. He kicked and splashed water in all directions.



Just then Mouse came running up. "Give me back my rubber. Squirrel, and you can have my nice new burrow."

Mole came stumbling along and said, "Give me back my rubber. Squirrel, and I'll give you a dozen apples."

Hedgehog crawled out from the bushes and said, "Give me back my rubber. Squirrel, and I'll give you a whole pile of pine nuts."

Squirrel listened to each and every one of them and said, "I don't need anything in exchange. I'll gladly share my rubber with you. You can all bathe your children here."



Mouse and Mole and Hedgehog felt so ashamed of themselves for being selfish that they would have blushed if they could only have done so.

